

# A DEFENSE OF THE JOHANNINE COMMA (1 JOHN 5:7)

An engraving of a man with long, wavy hair and a beard, wearing a dark, flowing robe. He is standing in a room filled with bookshelves, holding an open book in his hands. A lit candle on a stand is visible on a table to his left. The background shows a large, ornate bookshelf filled with books.

5:7

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# Introduction

Few controversies concerning variants in the New Testament rival the discussion surrounding the Johannine Comma, a reading found in 1 John 5:7. This small but meaningful phrase—"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."—has long been an important passage used for the affirmation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Despite its omission in most modern translations, the Johannine Comma was embraced as authentic Scripture by the vast majority of Christians for centuries. Modern textual criticism may challenge its authenticity, but there is a strong case for its rightful inclusion in the New Testament text.

This booklet will delve into the evidence supporting the Johannine Comma and will defend its place in the Bible against modern critiques.

The Johannine Comma is included in most older translations of the Bible in Europe. It was accepted and revered as part of God's Word, with its Trinitarian message being an important part of Christian doctrine. Throughout history, Christians read and taught this verse as an irrefutable declaration of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, proving the doctrine of the Trinity.

The great importance of the Johannine Comma cannot be overstated. It offers the clearest and most powerful affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity found in the entire Bible. Its removal from modern translations represents a large theological loss. Although the Trinity can be supported by other passages in the New Testament such as John 1:1, John 10:30, Colossians 2:9, Matthew 28:19 and John 8:58, none of them give such an explicit

declaration of the Trinity as 1 John 5:7. This verse has served as a bulwark against numerous heresies throughout history, such as Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ among others. By undermining this key passage, modern textual critics take out one of the strongest Scriptural arguments for one of Christianity's most fundamental doctrines.

It is no coincidence that this passage found its way into translations like the King James Version (KJV), among other influential translations such as the Tyndale, the Russian Synodal and the Spanish Reina Valera Bibles. The inclusion of this verse for centuries reflects the understanding of its divine inspiration and its importance in establishing sound doctrine. However, in the last two centuries, many modern translations, such as the NIV, ESV, and NASB, have excluded the Johannine Comma, citing a claimed lack of early Greek manuscript support. Critics argue that its absence in early Greek copies of 1 John is a reason to doubt its originality. Despite this, a very powerful case can be made for its inclusion within the New Testament.

The Johannine Comma is not merely a disputed textual variant—it is an important affirmation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The evidence supporting its inclusion in the New Testament is more robust than modern critics suggest, and the historical and theological significance of this passage cannot be overlooked. While modern translations may exclude the Comma, Christians should not abandon this verse. It has been a source of inspiration, doctrine, and truth for centuries, and it remains an important part of the text of scripture.

This booklet will argue that the manuscript evidence for the Johannine Comma is, in fact, sufficient to warrant its inclusion in

the New Testament. The Latin tradition, the Greek manuscripts, early Christian writings, the grammatical evidence and the theological significance of the passage all combine to provide a compelling case for its authenticity. Modern textual criticism, with its emphasis on a small group of manuscripts, has unfairly marginalized this key verse. The Johannine Comma deserves its place in Scripture, not just because of its historical and theological weight, but because it reflects the correct text of the Bible.

## **Greek evidence**

There is a general trend in textual criticism to hyperbolize the Greek evidence against the Johannine Comma. It is often claimed that the evidence is overwhelmingly negative, with the ratio presented as "thousands against 10." However, this rhetoric is misleading. Most of the thousands of Greek manuscripts referred to in these claims are not even manuscripts of the Epistle of John. In reality, the number of Greek manuscripts that actually contain 1 John 5 is only a few hundred. This more nuanced perspective indicates that the evidence is not decisively against the Johannine Comma as often suggested.

It is very important to establish the existence of the Johannine Comma within the Greek textual traditions, since the main claim of the modern textual critics is that the Johannine Comma is a Latin trinitarian gloss, which is why I will give depth to this section concerning the Greek witnesses to the Johannine Comma. If indeed it can be established that there are many independent Greek witnesses to this reading, the argument of the critics is significantly weakened

## Before the 10th century

Although the earliest Greek manuscripts to contain the Johannine Comma in the main text itself is from the 14th century, there exists plenty of other early references to the Johannine Comma within this early date.

A very important manuscript to consider in this discussion is the Codex Vaticanus (c. 325-350 AD) which is greatly favored by modern textual critics as one of the “most accurate” manuscripts of the New Testament. Although it may be surprising to those who advocate the traditional text (as the Codex Vaticanus is generally used as an argument against it), the Vaticanus actually represents one of the earliest Greek manuscripts which testify to the existence of the Johannine Comma. In the Codex Vaticanus, scribes used textual critical markers known as *diastigmai*—small sets of three dots—to indicate known variants within the text. These markers appear elsewhere in the manuscript, such as at John 7:53, where the story of the adulteress begins. These *diastigmai* in the Codex Vaticanus are found exactly where the Johannine Comma would belong, implying knowledge of the existence of this variant. However, critics often argue that the Codex Vaticanus likely referred to some other known variant in the text, such as the absence of the masculine gender in the Greek word “bear witness”. However, the *diastigmai* were typically used to highlight substantial textual variants or variations deemed noteworthy by the scribes. Minor variants, such as differences in gender or phrasing, were generally not marked.

Given this practice, it is unlikely that the scribes would have felt the need to mark a minor variant, such as the absence of the

masculine gender in the phrase "bear record," with diastigmai. Thus, there seems no other explanation for the existence of these markers within the Vaticanus than the Johannine comma, indicating that the Johannine Comma was either not viewed as a significant variant or was already considered part of the standard text.

It is also stated by Critical Text advocates that the earliest Greek references to the Johannine Comma come from the later medieval era, however nothing can be farther from the truth. F.H.A Scrivener mentions at least two Greek authors who referenced the comma in their writings, these being the Pseudo-Athanasian authors of the Synopsis of Holy Scripture and the Disputation with Arius, both dating to somewhere around the 300s or 400s:

*"Of the Greek Fathers it has been said that no one has cited it, even when it might be supposed to be most required by his argument, or though he quotes consecutively the verses going immediately before and after it!: [but a passage occurs in the Greek Synopsis of Holy Scripture of uncertain date (fourth or fifth century), which appears to refer to it, and another from the Disputation with Arius (Ps.-Athanasius)]."* (A plain introduction to the criticism of the New Testament for the use of Biblical students by Scrivener, Frederick Henry Ambrose, 1813-1891; Miller, Edward, 1825-1901)

In the "Disputation with Arius," the relevant passage reads:

"Τί δὲ καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀφέσεως τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν παρεκτικὸν, καὶ ζωοποιὸν, καὶ ἀγιαστικὸν λουτρόν, οὗ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, οὐκ ἐν τῇ τρισμακαρίᾳ ὄνομασίᾳ δίδοται

τοῖς πιστοῖς; Πρὸς δὲ τούτοις πᾶσιν Ἰωάννης φάσκει· «Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς τὸ ἐν εἰσιν.»"

Translated: "John states/affirms, 'and these three are one.'"

This early reference suggests that the Johannine Comma was known and cited in Greek Christian writings, reinforcing its presence in early Christian doctrine.

Additionally, it is possible that early Christians such as Origen (3rd century) and John Chrysostom (4th century) were aware of the Johannine Comma. Although Origen's reference is somewhat ambiguous, it is compellingly similar to the Johannine Comma. In his work on the Psalms, Origen uses the phrase "οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσιν," which translates directly to "the three are one," employing the exact same Greek words found in the Johannine Comma. While this similarity might be coincidental, it also suggests that Origen could have been referring to the Johannine Comma.

John Chrysostom provides a more explicit reference that closely aligns with 1 John 5:7-8. In his "Adversus Judaeos," he writes:

"Κάτω τρεῖς μάρτυρες, ἄνω τρεῖς μάρτυρες, τὸ ἀπρόσιτον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δόξης δηλοῦντες."

Translation: "Below three witnesses, above three witnesses, showing the unapproachable glory of God."

While it might be argued that the similarities are coincidental, this seems highly unlikely. The concept of "three witnesses" in both heavenly and earthly realms is uniquely expressed in the Johannine Comma. The probability of such a specific reference appearing by mere chance in early Christian writings is minimal.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that John Chrysostom's mention of three witnesses both above and below reflects an awareness of the Johannine Comma. This early acknowledgment further supports the argument that the Johannine Comma was an integral part of the Greek textual tradition from an early stage, rather than a later Latin addition.

This all is very significant, as it appears that we have actual manuscript and early Christian evidence of the Johannine Comma from the 4th century outside the Latin tradition. This challenges the central tenets of Critical Text theory, which heavily relies on the absence of the Johannine Comma in the earliest Greek manuscripts to argue that it is a later Latin addition. If indeed there are early Greek witnesses to the Comma, this undermines the argument that the passage is merely a Latin Trinitarian gloss that was later introduced into the Greek text.

## **After the 10th century**

Modern textual critics tend to also underestimate the presence of the Johannine Comma in later Greek witnesses to the Epistle of John. In this section, I will examine the later Greek witnesses to the Johannine Comma, and show that its presence within the Greek tradition was never lost.

Firstly, the extant manuscripts containing the Johannine Comma include 629, 61, 209, 918, 88, 429, 636, 177, 2473, 2318, 221, 635, and Ravianus. These manuscripts are generally later in origin, with Ottobonianus 298, dating to around the 1300s, being among the earliest. However, despite their late dates, their collective witness should not be totally ignored. For comparison,

the total number of manuscripts containing even the chapter of 1 John 5 before the 10th century amounts to only 12.

Here's a breakdown of these Greek manuscripts:

**Minuscule 629:** Dated to the 14th century, Minuscule 629 is one of the manuscripts that includes the Johannine Comma. It reflects the textual tradition prevalent in Byzantine manuscripts of its time and is the earliest Greek manuscript to contain the Johannine Comma within the main text itself. This manuscript shows the existence of the Johannine Comma within Greek manuscripts prior to the Textus Receptus.

**Codex Montfortianus:** Also known as Minuscule 61, this 16th-century manuscript is notable for including the Johannine Comma. It has been cited as a source used by Erasmus for his edition of the Johannine Comma. However, evidence suggests Erasmus used a now-lost manuscript distinct from Montfortianus, which will be discussed further.

**Minuscule 209:** Dating to the 14th century, this manuscript did not originally contain the Johannine Comma but was added later. Despite being a Greek manuscript, the footnotes containing the Comma was written in Latin in the margin by Cardinal Basil Bessarion (1403 – 1472). Thus, while it does not really provide a Greek witness to the Johannine Comma, it shows its use even within the East.

**Minuscule 918:** Another 16th-century manuscript, Minuscule 918, contains the Johannine Comma, contributing to its textual tradition during the Renaissance period.

**Minuscule 88:** Similar to Minuscule 918, Minuscule 88 includes the Johannine Comma in later manuscripts. The date at which the Comma was added into the margin is not specified.

**Minuscule 429:** Dated to the 14th century, this manuscript supports the Comma's presence in the Byzantine textual tradition, though the Comma was added into the margin at a later date.

**Minuscule 636:** An 11th-century manuscript, Minuscule 636 includes the Johannine Comma in the margin.

**Minuscule 177:** An 11th-century manuscript that includes the Johannine Comma within the text. It was added into the margin in the 1700s, differing from all printed versions of the Johannine Comma.

**Minuscule 2473:** Dating to the 17th century, this manuscript continues the tradition of including the Johannine Comma in later Greek manuscripts.

**Minuscule 2318:** An 18th-century commentary manuscript found in Romania that includes the Johannine Comma. Although it has been claimed that its source is the Textus Receptus, this connection remains unproven.

**Minuscule 221:** Dated to the 10th century, this manuscript includes the Johannine Comma in the margin, reaffirming its presence in later periods of textual transmission.

**Ravianus (Berlin Codex):** Although no longer considered a manuscript but rather a facsimile of the Complutensian Polyglot, Ravianus dates to the 16th century and contains the Johannine Comma.

**Minuscule 635:** An 11th-century manuscript with ambiguous text, Minuscule 635 seems to possibly include a short reference to the Johannine Comma, although it is not entirely certain due to the text's legibility.

In addition to these manuscripts, the Johannine Comma is cited by multiple later Greek theological writers. Among these was the Eastern writer “Joseph Bryennios”, who lived from 1350-1432 ad. Bryennios quotes the comma in his writings thus: “Καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἔστι μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι ὁ Χριστός ἔστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια. ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατὴρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσι· καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῇ, τὸ πνεῦμα, τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ τὸ αἷμα”

Being translated: “And it is the Spirit which beareth witness, because Christ is truth. For there are three which bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one; and there are three which bear witness on earth, the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood.”

Compared to Scrivener, Bryennios’ quote agrees almost identically with it:

7. ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατὴρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσι·  
(Bryennios)

7. ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες εν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· ...καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσι.  
(Scrivener)

The only thing which differs from the manuscript of Bryennios and Scrivener is word order. Scrivener has the word “Ἄγιον” ‘Holy’

before the word for Spirit, while the manuscript of Bryennios' had it the other way around. Nevertheless, the meaning is not changed by this variant, and if translated to English, it would translate identically.

Around the same time as Bryennios, it was also referenced to by Emmanuel Calecas, who died in the year 1410. Calecas includes the comma in the middle of two other Bible quotations from Matthew and John. The quote of Calecas reads thus:  
Translate:

“Αλλὰ μὴν τὰ ὅητὰ τῆς Γραφῆς τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Υἱῷ τρίτον τῇ τάξει συναριθμοῦαι τὸ Πνεῦμα.  
Φησὶ γὰρ ὁ Χριστὸς, "Πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἀπαντα, μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, Βαπτίζοντες; αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἄγιου Πνεύματος". (Matt 28:19) Καὶ ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης, Τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, ὁ Πατὴρ, ὁ Λόγος καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἄγιον. (1 John 5:7) Καὶ πάλιν, "Οταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος, ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. (John 15:26)"

Being translated:

“But indeed, the words of Scripture enumerate the Spirit third in order with the Father and the Son. For Christ says, 'Go ye

therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:' (Matt 28:19). And the Evangelist John says, 'For there are three who bear witness: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit' (1 John 5:7). And again, 'But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:' (John 15:26)."

The quote of Calecas does not include the words "in heaven", however he may have purposefully not included the whole quote and only quoted a portion of the verse. The quote of Calecas also includes the same difference from Scrivener as Bryennios' manuscript, having a different word order for the words "Holy Spirit":

(...) Τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, (.....) ὁ Πατὴρ, ὁ Λόγος καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἄγιον. (Calecas)

ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες εν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα. (Scrivener)

A third Greek theologian to mention the Johannine comma was Peter Mogilas in the year 1640, however because this was quoted after the TR was already made, it is not known if he quoted any existing Greek Byzantine manuscripts or the Textus Receptus itself. It is also cited in Greek by the Acts of the Lateran Council (1215) in the West, however it seems to have been translated from Latin.

Nevertheless, the examples of Bryennios and Calecas show the existence of the Johannine Comma within the Byzantine Greek tradition. Even though it certainly is and was a minority reading

within the Greek manuscript tradition, it was common enough to be used by medieval Greek theologians in their theological treatises.

In addition to the few existing Greek manuscripts to contain the Johannine Comma and Christian theological writers, there are literary references to now lost Greek manuscripts which contained the Johannine Comma.

Firstly, although Erasmus is often said to have taken the Johannine Comma from the Codex Montfortianus (as previously mentioned), this identification is very unlikely. Erasmus in his annotations mentions two sources for his inclusion of the Johannine Comma, these are the “Hispanic Codex” and the “British Codex”. The Hispanic Codex is identified with the Complutensian Polyglot, however the identification of the British Codex is more difficult. Textual critics often try to identify the British Codex with the Codex Montfortianus, saying that Montfortianus was specifically made for Erasmus to add the comma. However, this theory is unlikely, since Erasmus in his annotations describes the reading found in the British Codex, which follows thus:

“ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, πατήρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεῦμα, καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἐν εἰσιν. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῇ, πνεῦμα, καὶ ὄδωρ καὶ αἷμα.”

This description differs from what is found in Codex Montfortianus, with Erasmus’ quote excluding the word “ἅγιον” ‘Holy’ after “πνεῦμα” ‘Spirit’ and not including the article “οἱ” before “μαρτυροῦντες” ‘bear witness’. This suggests that the Textus Receptus derived the Comma from a now-lost manuscript,

serving as its own independent witness to the Johannine Comma. Furthermore, the Complutensian Polyglot (1517ad), although a printed edition, as previously noted, also included the Johannine Comma in Greek. This printed edition was based on multiple manuscripts available to the medieval scholars behind it.

As mentioned by G.R. McDonald in his thesis on the Comma, in addition to the British Codex, it is known that another Greek manuscript kept in Antwerp until the Napoleonic wars when it was destroyed by the French army contained the Johannine Comma as a footnote. This manuscript was mentioned by many medieval authors, and was used by Edward Lee to persuade Erasmus to include the Johannine Comma within his printed editions.

Although the Antwerp codex was not enough to persuade Erasmus at this time, he later agreed to add the Comma into the text when he was given the British Codex. Nevertheless, the existence of the Antwerp Codex provides another known manuscript of the New Testament to contain this reading. Among other secondary mentions of Greek manuscripts to contain the Johannine comma comes from John Gill, an 18th-century Baptist writer who defended the Comma. Gill in his commentary noted that out of Robert Stephens' Greek copies, nine contained the Comma. He wrote:

"And as to its being wanting in some Greek manuscripts, as the Alexandrian, and others, it need only be said, that it is to be found in many others; it is in an old British copy, and in the Complutensian edition, the compilers of which made use of various copies; and out of sixteen ancient copies of Robert Stephens's, nine of them had it" (Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible).

John Calvin, in his commentary, also acknowledged the Johannine Comma, noting that it was present in what he considered the "best" manuscripts of his time:

"But as even the Greek copies do not agree, I dare not assert anything on the subject. Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause is added, and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies, I am inclined to receive it as the true reading" (Calvin's Commentaries).

Furthermore, the Johannine Comma was inserted into the official Patriarchal text of the Greek Church, produced in the early 1900s, based primarily on lectionary manuscripts from Mount Athos, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Athens.

## **The grammatical argument**

Although Gregory Naziansus' manuscript did not seem to include the Johannine Comma, he was very puzzled about the grammar of the text and did not know what to make of it, writing:

"What about John, then, when in his Catholic Epistle he says that there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood? 26 Do you think he is talking nonsense? First, because he has ventured to reckon under one numeral things which are not consubstantial, though you say this ought to be done only in the case of things which are consubstantial. For who would assert that these are consubstantial? Secondly, because he has not been consistent in the way he has happened upon his terms; for after using three in the masculine gender he adds three words which are neuter, contrary to the definitions and laws which you and your grammarians have laid down.

For what is the difference between putting a masculine three first, and then adding one and one and one in the neuter, or after a masculine one and one and one to use the three not in the masculine but in the neuter, which you yourself disclaim in the case of deity? What have you to say about the crab, which may mean either an animal or an instrument or a constellation? And what about the dog, now terrestrial, now aquatic, now celestial? Do you not see that three crabs or dogs are spoken of? Why, of course it is so. Well, then, are they therefore of one substance? None but a fool would say that. So you see how completely your argument from connumeration has broken down, and is refuted by all these instances. For if things that are of one substance are not always counted under one numeral, things not of one substance are thus counted, and the pronunciation of the name once for all is used in both cases, what advantage do you gain towards your doctrine?" (Oration 31 - The Fifth Theological Oration. On the Holy Spirit, XIX)

In Greek, words have grammatical gender, which must agree for a sentence to be grammatically correct. Around the 4th century, Gregory of Nazianzus wrote about the grammatical issue in 1 John 5:7-8 as it appeared without the Johannine Comma. He noted, "for after using three in the masculine gender, he adds three words which are neuter, contrary to the definitions and laws which you and your grammarians have laid down." Gregory was addressing the grammatical problem caused by the masculine gender in the phrase "*τρεις εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες*" ("there are three that bear witness"), which is followed by three neuter nouns: "*τὸ πνεῦμα*" (the Spirit), "*τὸ οὐδωρ*" (the water), and "*τὸ αἷμα*" (the blood). However, this problem does not exist with the inclusion of the Johannine Comma, since the words "The Father" and "The

"Word" are masculine, thus the grammatical anomaly provides strong internal evidence for its originality in the text of 1 John.

Critics have argued that the grammatical issue arises because John was attempting to personify the Spirit in the mention of the earthly witnesses. However, John does not use the masculine gender in verse 6, where he speaks of the Spirit bearing witness. If John had used the masculine gender for "bear witness" to personify the Spirit, we would expect the same in verse 6, but this is not the case. This significant Greek grammatical anomaly offers strong internal evidence in favor of the Johannine Comma's originality.

## **Summary**

Thus, having worked with the Greek data for the Johannine comma, the data can be summarized thus:

**Greek witnesses to include the Johannine Comma:** Codex Vaticanus\* (325ad), 629 (14th century), 61 (1520 ad), 209 (15th century margin), Complutensian Polyglot (16th century), 918 (16th century), Ravianus (16th century), 88 (16th century margin), 429 (16th century margin), 636 (16th century margin), 177 (16th century margin), 2473 (17th century), 2318 (18th century), 221 (19th century margin), possibly 635 (17th century margin), the lost codices: British Codex (16th or earlier), Antwerp Codex (16th or earlier) and the 9 codices of Stephanus (16th or earlier). Quoted possibly by Origen\* (3rd century) alongside John Chrysostom (4th century), Synopsis of Holy Scripture (4-5th century), Disputation against Arius (4th-5th century), Acts of the Lateran Council (13th century), Emmanuel Calecas (14th century), Joseph Bryonnios (14th century) and Peter Moglas (17th century).

Thus, the Greek attestation of the Johannine comma is greater than often stated, and shows its independent existence within the Greek manuscript traditions. Thus, although the majority of Greek manuscripts lack the Comma, there is strong evidence of its initial inclusion within the existing Greek manuscripts.

## Latin evidence

The strongest attestation for the Johannine Comma exists within the Latin text traditions, where it is deeply embedded in both the Old Latin and the Vulgate manuscripts. The Comma appears in a range of Old Latin texts dating as far back as the 4th century, reflecting its early inclusion within Western Christian biblical traditions. It is particularly significant in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible completed by Jerome in the late 4th century, which became the authoritative Bible for the Western Church.

The Johannine Comma is also widely cited by Latin-speaking theologians, such as Cyprian of Carthage, who alludes to it in his writings as early as the 3rd century. Other notable figures, like Fulgentius of Ruspe and Priscillian of Ávila, also made use of this passage in their theological arguments, suggesting that it was regarded as scriptural and authoritative in the Latin Christian context. In fact, the Comma was often employed in discussions of Trinitarian doctrine, particularly in defending the concept of the Holy Trinity during the various theological disputes of the early church.

Moreover, the Comma's presence in later Latin manuscripts and its continued citation throughout the Middle Ages further solidified its status within the Latin tradition.

## Manuscripts

Several key **Latin manuscripts** include or reference the Johannine Comma, either as part of the main text or as a later addition in the margins. These manuscripts reflect its wide circulation and varying levels of integration into the biblical text.

- **Codex Speculum (m):**

- *Date:* 5th century
- *Place:* Saint Cross Monastery (Sessorianus), Rome
- *Other Information:* This manuscript is part of a collection of biblical quotations rather than a complete biblical text. Despite this, it includes the Johannine Comma, reflecting its early use in theological discourse. As one of the oldest witnesses containing the Comma, it demonstrates its presence in early Latin Christianity.

- **Codex Fuldensis (F):**

- *Date:* 546 AD
- *Place:* Fulda, Germany
- *Other Information:* Codex Fuldensis is a significant early Vulgate manuscript. While the main text does not include the Comma, the Prologue to the Catholic Epistles, attributed to Jerome, discusses the verse, indicating that Jerome himself was aware of it.

- **Frisingensia Fragmenta (r/q):**

- *Date:* 5th–7th century
- *Place:* Bavarian State Library, Munich
- *Other Information:* These fragments are of Spanish origin and provide a rare example of early Latin biblical manuscripts containing the Comma. They are among the few surviving pieces of evidence from the early medieval period showing the Comma's presence in Western Europe, particularly in Spain.

- **León Palimpsest (I) (Beuron 67):**
  - *Date:* 7th century
  - *Place:* León Cathedral
  - *Other Information:* This palimpsest, of Spanish origin, contains an explicit reference to the Comma in both the heavenly and earthly witnesses. The wording used in the manuscript is particularly important: "and there are three which bear testimony in heaven, the Father, and the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one in Christ Jesus." The mention of earthly witnesses preceding the heavenly ones reflects a pattern seen in other Spanish manuscripts.
- **Codex Cavensis (C):**
  - *Date:* 9th century
  - *Place:* La Cava de' Tirreni, Italy
  - *Other Information:* Like many other Spanish manuscripts, Codex Cavensis includes the Johannine Comma, with the earthly witnesses mentioned before the heavenly ones. The Comma's consistent presence in Spanish manuscripts such as this one points to a strong textual tradition in the Iberian Peninsula that favored the inclusion of the verse.
- **Codex Ulmensis (U or σU):**
  - *Date:* 9th century
  - *Place:* British Museum, London
  - *Other Information:* This manuscript is also of Spanish origin and includes the Comma. It was one of the many Spanish Latin texts that carried the Trinitarian addition, further attesting to the spread of the Johannine Comma throughout Spain and its enduring influence in the Latin tradition.
- **Codex Complutensis I (C):**
  - *Date:* 927 AD

- *Place*: Biblical University Centre 31, Madrid
- **Codex Theodulphianus**:
  - *Date*: 8th–9th century
  - *Place*: National Library, Paris (BnF Latin 9380)
  - *Other Information*: This manuscript, of Franco-Spanish origin, includes the Johannine Comma. Theodulf of Orléans, an important figure in the Carolingian Renaissance, oversaw revisions to the Vulgate that included the Comma. The spread of his revisions further cemented the Comma's presence in the Latin Bible across the Carolingian Empire.
- **Codex Sangallensis 907**:
  - *Date*: 8th–9th century
  - *Place*: Abbey of St. Gallen
  - *Other Information*: Another manuscript of Franco-Spanish origin, Sangallensis 907 includes the Comma, demonstrating its influence in both Spanish and Frankish scriptoria.
- **Codex Lemovicensis-32 (L)**:
  - *Date*: 9th century
  - *Place*: National Library of France (Latin 328)
  - *Other Information*: Contains the Johannine Comma, further exemplifying its widespread use in Latin manuscripts during the early medieval period, particularly in monastic centers across France and Spain.
- **Codex Vercellensis**:
  - *Date*: 9th century
  - *Place*: Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana
  - *Other Information*: This manuscript is part of the recension of **Alcuin**, completed in 801. Alcuin's recension played a critical role in standardizing the Vulgate text across the Carolingian Empire, and the inclusion of the Comma in this

recension shows its growing acceptance in the Latin tradition.

- **Codex Sangallensis 63:**

- *Date:* 9th century
- *Place:* Abbey Library of Saint Gall
- *Other Information:* While the Johannine Comma was added later in the margin, its presence demonstrates how scribes continued to insert the verse into existing texts, reflecting its growing theological significance even in places where it was not originally present.

- **Codex Gothicus Legionensis:**

- *Date:* 960 AD
- *Place:* Biblioteca Capitular y Archivo de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro
- *Other Information:* This codex includes the Johannine Comma, reflecting its consistent presence in the Spanish tradition well into the 10th century.

- **Codex Toletanus:**

- *Date:* 10th century
- *Place:* Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional
- *Other Information:* Another manuscript of Spanish origin, the Toletanus reflects the common Spanish tradition of placing the earthly witnesses before the heavenly ones, a recurring pattern in many Latin texts.

### **Codex Demidovianus:**

- *Date:* 12th century
- *Other Information:* This manuscript is a mixed Vulgate/Old Latin manuscript, which contains Acts, the Pauline Epistles, the Epistles of John, Peter and Jude alongside Revelation.

It has often been debated whether the Latin Vulgate originally contained the Johannine Comma. While a few Vulgate manuscripts lack the Comma in the main text, the majority of later Latin manuscripts include it. This has led critical scholars to argue that the Comma was inserted into the Vulgate text later. However, even the manuscripts which lack the comma have traces of its existence. The wording in verse 7—"tres unum sunt"—translates the Greek phrase "Τρεις ἐν εἰσιν" from the Comma, while verse 8 in the Greek text uses "εἰς" (translated as "in" in Latin). The phrase "tres unum sunt" in the Vulgate is unusual in verse 8, which, if translated literally from the Greek, should read "tres in unum sunt," as seen in the Nova Vulgata. The omission of "in" appears to be an attempt to harmonize the text with the reading of verse 7 found in the Johannine Comma, making the passage flow more smoothly. There is no compelling reason for this omission in 1 John 5:8 unless the original Vulgate had been influenced by the Johannine Comma. This difference indicates that the Comma likely shaped the Vulgate's rendering of verse 8.

## Quotations

The earliest proposed Latin quotation that resembles the Johannine Comma can be traced to Tertullian (160-225 AD). In his work *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian writes the phrase "tres unum sunt" (the three are one), which has been suggested as a quotation of the Comma. While this reference is not fully certain to have come from the Johannine Comma, it is often cited as an early Latin expression of the Trinitarian concept that aligns closely with later explicit references to the Johannine Comma. Tertullian also came from a region where the Johannine Comma is known to have been often attested to, and not long after him a more explicit and widely cited reference comes from Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258 AD), who provides a direct allusion to

the Johannine Comma in his treatise *On the Unity of the Church*.

Writing in the 3rd century, Cyprian states:

*"The Lord says, 'I and the Father are one;' and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, 'And these three are one."*

Cyprian's words are often considered the earliest explicit mention of the Johannine Comma, particularly because he uses the phrase "it is written," which strongly suggests that he was quoting scripture directly. His citation holds great weight in textual studies due to his early date (circa 200–258 AD), long before the Comma appears in later manuscripts. Critical scholars recognize the significance of Cyprian, as his mention of what resembles the Johannine Comma predates most textual evidence of the passage. Granting that Cyprian was quoting the Comma directly also raises the possibility that Tertullian, an earlier North African theologian, was referring to it as well, given the geographical and chronological proximity between the two.

Because of this, scholars have attempted various weak explanations to account for Cyprian's apparent reference to the Comma. One theory posits that Cyprian might have been the source of the Comma's introduction into the Latin biblical tradition. For instance, Galiza and Reeve suggest, "Therefore, we are left with actual evidence that Cyprian may have created the comma or an argument from silence that he is the first to quote the comma from a hypothetical manuscript. If one applies the principle of Ocham's razor to this question, the simplest answer is that Cyprian created the Johannine comma." (The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7–8): The Status of Its Textual History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin. Rodrigo Galiza, Berrien Springs, Michigan and John W. Reeve, Andrews University. However, this explanation is very weak.

First, if Cyprian had been the originator of the Johannine Comma, we would expect it to have been primarily a North African textual

phenomenon. However, the Comma is widely attested in the Latin tradition, not only in North Africa but also in regions such as Spain, where it was quoted by Latin authors and appears in many Latin manuscripts. This widespread circulation suggests that the Comma was not a localized or newly introduced element, but rather an established part of the Latin scriptural tradition well beyond Cyprian's region.

Moreover, some have objected that Cyprian may not have been quoting the Comma at all, but instead was offering an allegorical interpretation of 1 John 5:8, reading the three elements—water, blood, and spirit—as symbols of the Trinity. However, there is no evidence to support the claim that such an allegorical reading was common within the Latin Church, nor is there any reason to believe Cyprian would employ the phrase "it is written" to introduce his own allegorical interpretation or paraphrase of the text. On the contrary, Cyprian's use of "it is written" indicates a direct reference to scripture, as seen elsewhere in his writings.

Given these factors, the simplest and most plausible explanation is that Cyprian was indeed quoting the Johannine Comma, which was already part of his textual tradition. This provides early evidence that the Comma was circulating in Latin theological discussions, even if not widely accepted in Greek manuscripts.

In 380 AD, Priscillian of Ávila quoted the Johannine Comma explicitly, marking one of the clearest and most significant early references in the Latin tradition. He writes:

*"As John says, there are three which give testimony on earth: the water, the flesh, the blood, and these three are in one; and there are three which give testimony in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one in Christ Jesus."*

Priscillian's use of the Johannine Comma as authentic scripture

affirms its presence and acceptance in the Latin West during the 4th century. His quotation of the verse is particularly significant because it predates many key manuscripts, such as the Codex Alexandrinus (circa 400 AD), which does not include the Comma. This early citation demonstrates that the passage was in circulation well before its appearance in later Latin texts and that it held theological weight within certain Christian communities. Even critical scholars, who generally question the authenticity of the Johannine Comma, acknowledge its existence in the writings of Priscillian, providing important evidence of its early use.

In addition to Priscillian, the Johannine Comma is also found in a work titled the *Expositio Fidei*, attributed to an unknown author and dated to around the same period as Priscillian's writings. This text, like Priscillian's, includes a quotation of the Comma, further attesting to its presence in Latin theological traditions during the 4th and 5th centuries. The *Expositio Fidei* reads:

"pater est Ingenitus, filius uero sine Initio genitus a patre est, spiritus autem sanctus processit a patre et accipit de filio, Sicut euangelista testatur quia scriptum est, "Tres sunt qui dicunt testimonium in caelo pater uerbum et spiritus:" et haec tria unum sunt."

Translated:

"The Father is unbegotten, but the Son is begotten of the Father without beginning, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and receives from the Son, as the Evangelist testifies, for it is written: 'There are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Spirit,' and these three are one"

The fact that both Priscillian and the *Expositio Fidei* cite this verse around the same time strengthens the argument for its early inclusion in Latin texts. These early citations highlight the Comma's importance

in the Latin West, suggesting that it was regarded as authoritative scripture very early on.

Moving unto the 5th century, the Johannine Comma was also utilized by the African writer Victor Vitensis in Latin, who wrote the book “A History of the African Province Persecution, in the Times of Genseric and Huneric, the Kings of the Vandals”. In this book, Victor Vitensis explicitly cites the comma as scripture by writing:

*“Et ut adhuc luce clarius unius divinitatis esse cum Patre et Filio Spiritum sanctum doceamus, Joannis evangelistae testimonio comprobatur. Ait namque: Tres sunt qui testimonium perhibent in caelo, Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus sanctus, et his tres unum sunt”*

Being translated, it reads thus:

*“And so that we may teach with even greater clarity that the Holy Spirit is of one divinity with the Father and the Son, it is confirmed by the testimony of the Evangelist John. For he says: ‘There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one’.*

Around the same time, the Council of Carthage (484 AD), attended by hundreds of bishops, further cemented the Comma’s importance in early Trinitarian debates. It was cited as part of the official record, providing theological proof of the Trinity:

*“And so, no occasion for uncertainty is left. It is clear that the Holy Spirit is also God and the author of his own will, he who is most clearly shown to be at work in all things and to bestow the gifts of the divine dispensation according to the judgment of his own will, because where it is proclaimed that he distributes graces where he wills, servile condition cannot exist, for servitude is to be understood in what is created, but power and freedom in the Trinity. And so that we may teach the Holy Spirit to be of one divinity with the Father and the Son still more clearly than the light, here is proof from the testimony of*

*John the evangelist. For he says: "There are three who bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one." Surely he does not say "three separated by a difference in quality" or "divided by grades which differentiate, so that there is a great distance between them"? No, he says that the "three are one". But so that the single divinity which the Holy Spirit has with the Father and the Son might be demonstrated still more in the creation of all things, you have in the book of Job the Holy Spirit as a creator: "It is the divine Spirit"."*

This demonstrates that the Comma was actively used in defending Trinitarian doctrine, contradicting the argument that it was absent from early theological debates. What is particularly noteworthy is the confidence with which the bishops at the Council of Carthage used the Comma in their arguments. They evidently regarded the passage as an authoritative and original part of scripture, suggesting they believed it had strong argumentative weight. This confidence indicates that the Comma must have already been widely accepted and circulated in Latin manuscripts for the bishops to deploy it so decisively in defense of Trinitarian theology. The fact that they were willing to rely on the Comma in such a critical theological and political setting suggests that it had been integrated into the Latin biblical tradition for some time and was considered to hold significant exegetical value.

Another important point to consider is Jerome's Prologue to the Canonical Epistles, which plays a crucial role in the debate surrounding the authenticity of the Johannine Comma. The crucial passage in the prologue reads thus:

"If the letters were also rendered faithfully by translators into Latin just as their authors composed them, they would not cause the reader confusion, nor would the differences between their wording give rise to contradictions, nor would the various phrases contradict each other,

especially in that place where we read the clause about the unity of the Trinity in the first letter of John. Indeed, it has come to our notice that in this letter some unfaithful translators have gone far astray from the truth of the faith, for in their edition they provide just the words for three [witnesses]—namely water, blood and spirit—and omit the testimony of the Father, the Word and the Spirit, by which the Catholic faith is especially strengthened, and proof is tendered of the single substance of divinity possessed by Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

While it has often been argued that this Prologue was written by a Pseudo-Jerome due to claims that the original Vulgate did not include the Johannine Comma, a closer examination reveals that this conclusion may be premature. The Latin grammar and structure of Jerome's Prologue suggest that the Johannine Comma was indeed present in his version of the Vulgate. As such, there is little reason to assume that the Prologue is pseudonymous based on this argument alone.

Furthermore, even if one were to maintain that the Prologue is pseudonymous, its early attestation makes it an important witness in its own right. The Prologue is found in the 6th-century Codex Fuldensis, one of the earliest Latin manuscripts, which points to an early date for the document's composition. This suggests that whether or not Jerome himself wrote the Prologue, it reflects a tradition that was already well-established by the early 6th century and was possibly even earlier. The significance of this lies in the fact that it gives us insight into how the Johannine Comma was viewed within early Latin Christianity, especially by those who recognized it as an integral part of the text.

In this Prologue, Jerome makes a pointed argument that the Epistle of John had been poorly transmitted by certain scribes, leading to the

omission of the Johannine Comma in some manuscripts. Jerome claims that this omission was the result of scribal corruption, as some copyists had either carelessly or deliberately excluded the verse. His argument implies that he viewed the Comma as original to the text and that its absence in certain manuscripts was a later error rather than evidence of its non-authenticity. This defense of the Comma's inclusion adds weight to the argument that Jerome, or the author of the Prologue, considered it to be an essential part of the Epistle.

Among other significant early references to the Johannine Comma is the book *Contra Varimadum*, written in the 5th century, which was widely influential in its time. The text makes a clear and explicit reference to the Johannine Comma, reading as follows:

"John the Evangelist, in his Epistle to the Parthians (i.e., his 1st Epistle), says there are three who afford testimony on earth, the Water, the Blood, and the Flesh, and these three are in us; and there are three who afford testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one."

This citation is notable for its early date and the fact that it reflects the common Latin reading of the Johannine Comma, affirming its presence in the Latin text tradition by the 5th century. *Contra Varimadum* played an important role in shaping theological understanding in the West, and its use of the Comma demonstrates the verse's early integration into theological discourse.

Several other notable Latin authors further confirm the presence and importance of the Johannine Comma in early Latin Christianity. One such figure is Fulgentius of Ruspe, a 6th-century theologian, who cited the Johannine Comma in his work *Responsio contra Arianos*. He wrote:

"In the Father, therefore, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge unity of substance, but dare not confound the persons. For St. John the apostle testifies, saying, 'There are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one.'"

Fulgentius was a staunch defender of Trinitarianism against the Arian heresy, and his use of the Johannine Comma illustrates how the verse was employed in theological arguments concerning the nature of the Trinity. His citation also reinforces the Comma's role in supporting traditional Trinitarian doctrine during this period.

Around the same time, Cassiodorus, a Roman statesman and scholar, also referenced the Johannine Comma in his *Complexiones in Epistolis Apostolorum*. He wrote:

"On earth three mysteries bear witness, the water, the blood, and the spirit, which were fulfilled, we read, in the passion of the Lord. In heaven, are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one God."

Cassiodorus's writings were influential in the preservation and transmission of Christian texts during the early Middle Ages, and his citation of the Johannine Comma further indicates its acceptance and authority in theological writings of the time.

Slightly later, it is also referenced to by Ambrose Ansbert in his commentary on Revelation (around 750ad), which reads:

*"Although the expression of faithful witness found therein, refers directly to Jesus Christ alone, – yet it equally characterises the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; according to these words of St. John. There are three which bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one."*

Although Ambrose Ansbert is a later author, his commentary further shows the consistency of the Latin manuscript tradition in including the reading.

The Johannine Comma continued to enjoy strong support throughout the medieval period, becoming universally accepted as authentic within the Western Latin tradition. G.R. McDonald, in his thesis *Raising the Ghost of Arius: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma and Religious Difference in Early Modern Europe*, although rejecting the authenticity of the Comma, nevertheless notes that many prominent medieval theologians and writings cited it. Among these examples are:

- **Donation of Constantine** (8th century)
- **Peter Damian** (c. 1007–1072)
- **Rupert of Deutz** (c. 1070–1129/1130)
- **Bernard of Clairvaux** (c. 1090–1153)
- **Peter Lombard** (c. 1095–1160)
- **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098–1179)
- **Petrus Cellensis** (1115–1183)
- **Baldwin of Canterbury** († 1190)
- **Guillaume of Saint-Jacques de Liège** (twelfth century)
- **Peter Abelard** (1079–1142)
- **Alexander of Ashby** (c. 1150–c. 1208)
- **Bonaventure** (1217/1218–1274)
- **Thomas Aquinas** (1225–1274)
- **Guillaume Durand** (1237–1296)
- **Franciscus of Marchia** (1285/1290–after 1343)
- **Thomas of Cobham** († c. 1333/1336)
- **William of Ockham** (c. 1290/1300–c. 1349/1350)

These theologians represent very influential figures in medieval Western Christianity, and their use of the Johannine Comma demonstrates the verse's integral role in supporting the doctrine of the

Trinity. The wide acceptance of the Johannine Comma by these and other scholars underscores the verse's deep entrenchment in the Latin tradition and its authoritative status within Western Christianity during the medieval period.

## Summary

**Latin witnesses to include the Johannine Comma:** Codex Speculum (400s), Frisigensia Fragmenta (400s), Codex Fuldensis\* (546ad), León palimpsest (600s), Wodex Wizanburgensis (700s), Codex Theodulphianus (700s), Codex Sangallensis 907 (700s), Codex Cavensis (800s), Codex Ulmensis (800s), Codex Lemovicensis-32 (800s), Codex Vercellensis (800s), Codex Sangallensis 63 (800s), Codex Complutensis (927 ad), Codex Gothicus Legionensis (960 ad), Codex Toletanus (900s) and Codex Demidovianus (1100s), all later medieval Vulgate manuscripts, Complutensian Polyglot (1527 ad) and the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate (1592). Quoted by Tertullian (late 100s), Cyprian (200s), Priscillian (380 ad), Expositio Fidei (300s), Jerome (400s), Contra Varimadum (400s), Victor Vitensis (400s), Council of Carthage (483 ad), Fulgentius of Ruspe (500s), Cassidorus (500s), Ambrose Ansbert (700s), Donation of Constantine (700s), Peter Damian (c. 1007–1072), Rupert of Deutz (c. 1070–1129/1130), Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153), Peter Lombard (c. 1095–1160), Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Petrus Cellensis (1115–1183), Baldwin of Canterbury († 1190), Guillaume of Saint-Jacques de Liège (twelfth century), Peter Abelard (1079–1142), Alexander of Ashby (c. 1150–c. 1208), Bonaventure (1217/1218–1274), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Guillaume Durand (1237–1296), Franciscus of Marchia (1285/1290–after 1343), Thomas of Cobham († c. 1333/1336) and William of Ockham (c. 1290/1300–c. 1349/1350).

## Other languages

One of the earliest witnesses worth noting is the Syriac Peshitta, which dates to the early 400s. While the Johannine Comma is mostly absent from the Peshitta, there is an important textual clue that may indicate its earlier presence. In 1 John 5:7, most modern translations lacking the Comma begin the verse with "For there are...". However, the Peshitta translates the opening of this passage with "And there are...", a phrase only found in Bibles that include the Johannine Comma. This subtle but significant difference could suggest that the Syriac translator worked from a Greek manuscript that contained a remnant of the Comma.

In texts without the Comma, the phrase typically begins with the Greek word "ὅτι" (oti), which is translated as "For" (as seen in most modern Bibles, such as the Nestle-Aland 27th edition:

"οτι τρεις εισιν οι μαρτυρουντες, το πνευμα και το υδωρ και το αιμα, και οι τρεις εις το εν εισιν"

"For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree." (ESV)).

However, the Syriac Peshitta does something different. Instead of translating "ὅτι" as "because" (as it does earlier in 1 John 5:4), it uses a copulative Waw (o) conjunction ("And"). This shift in translation seems to reflect the influence of an underlying Greek text that read "και τρεις εισιν" ("And there are three"), a construction that would only make sense if the Johannine Comma had once been present in the

manuscript tradition. This was already noticed by the 19th century Christian writer Thomas Burgess, who wrote on the Peshitta:

“The conjunctive particle, which, in the Syriac version, introduces the’ testimony of the Spirit; the water, and the blood, betrays the loss of the preceding clause. “ (A vindication of 1 John, v. 7 from the objections of M. Griesbach)

Therefore, even though the full Comma does not appear, the structure of the Syriac text hints at its earlier inclusion. It also appears to be quoted by the 7th century Syriac written Jacob of Edessa in his Explanation of the Holy Mysteries, where he makes a trinitarian reference alongside the water, blood and Spirit. Critics argue that Jacob was not referencing the Comma, but only the writing of Against Varidamus:

“St James, Jacob of Edessa († 708) writes that the soul, the body and the reason are cleansed by three holy things: water, blood and Spirit, and further by the Father, Son and Spirit. The human soul, body and reason correspond to the Father, Son and Spirit respectively, and we thus reflect the Trinity within us. Baumstark suggested that Jacob absorbed this notion from one of the Latin New Testament readings, and points to the text-type represented by Codex Toletanus as a possible source. Yet Jacob’s argument that the divine Trinity exists “within us” suggests rather that he was relying on Against Varimadus I.5 or something quite like it” (Raising the ghost of Arius : Erasmus, the Johannine comma and religious difference in early modern Europe, McDonald, G.R. )

However, even granting that Jacob of Edessa was quoting Against Varidamus, it would not make sense that he would do that if he had not seen this variant in some manuscripts, as Against Varidamus makes it explicitly clear that this is a reading from the Bible:

"John the Evangelist, in his Epistle to the Parthians (i.e., his 1st Epistle), says there are three who afford testimony on earth, the Water, the Blood, and the Flesh, and these three are in us; and there are three who afford testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one." (Contra Varidamum)'

Thus, the Syriac writer Jacob of Edessa seems to have known of the Johannine Comma.

The Armenian manuscript tradition also has traces of the Johannine Comma, and it was quoted in the Armenian Synod of Sis from the 14th century and found in Uscan's edition of the Armenian Bible (16th century), as Scrivener says:

"five very recent ones and Uscan's edition contain it" (A plain introduction to the criticism of the New Testament for the use of Biblical students by Scrivener, Frederick Henry Ambrose, 1813-1891; Miller, Edward, 1825-1901)

The Slavonic tradition also provides minor evidence for the Johannine Comma, though it appears more marginally. Scrivener in his plain introduction to the criticism of the New Testament notes that the Comma is found in some Slavonic manuscripts, and it is even present in the margin of the Moscow edition of the 17th century. This marginal notation provides further evidence of the widespread awareness and influence of the Johannine Comma across various textual traditions.

## Summary of all data

**Witnesses to include the Johannine Comma:** Codex Vaticanus\* (325ad), Peshitta\* (400ad) some later Greek witnesses: 629 (14th century), 61 (1520 ad), 209 (15th century margin), Complutensian Polyglot (16th century), 918 (16th century), Ravianus (16th century), 88 (16th century margin), 429 (16th century margin), 636 (16th century margin), 177 (16th century margin), 2473 (17th century), 2318

(18th century), 221 (19th century margin), possibly 635 (17th century margin), the lost codices: British Codex (16th or earlier), Antwerp Codex (16th or earlier) and the 9 codices of Stephanus (16th or earlier), Vulgate and Old Latin manuscripts: Codex Speculum (400s), Frisigensia Fragmenta (400s), Codex Fuldensis\* (546ad), León palimpsest (600s), Wodex Wizanburgensis (700s), Codex Theodulphianus (700s), Codex Sangallensis 907 (700s), Codex Cavensis (800s), Codex Ulmensis (800s), Codex Lemovicensis-32 (800s), Codex Vercellensis (800s), Codex Sangallensis 63 (800s), Codex Complutensis (927 ad), Codex Gothicus Legionensis (960 ad), Codex Toletanus (900s) and Codex Demidovianus (1100s), also being included in the later Latin Sixto-Clementine Vulgate (1592). Quoted in Greek possibly by Origen\* (3rd century) alongside John Chrysostom (4th century), Synopsis of Holy Scripture (4-5th century), Disputation against Arius (4th-5th century), Acts of the Lateran Council (13th century), Emmanuel Calecas (14th century), Joseph Bryonnios (14th century) and Peter Moglas (17th century), and quoted in Latin by Tertullian (late 100s), Cyprian (200s), Priscillian (380 ad), Expositio Fidei (300s), Jerome (400s), Contra Varimadum (400s), Victor Vitensis (400s), Council of Carthage (483 ad), Fulgentius of Ruspe (500s), Cassidorus (500s), Ambrose Ansbert (700s), Donation of Constantine (700s), Peter Damian (c. 1007–1072), Rupert of Deutz (c. 1070–1129/1130), Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153), Peter Lombard (c. 1095–1160), Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Petrus Cellensis (1115–1183), Baldwin of Canterbury († 1190), Guillaume of Saint-Jacques de Liège (twelfth century), Peter Abelard (1079–1142), Alexander of Ashby (c. 1150–c. 1208), Bonaventure (1217/1218–1274), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Guillaume Durand (1237–1296), Franciscus of Marchia (1285/1290–after 1343), Thomas of Cobham († c. 1333/1336) and William of Ockham (c. 1290/1300–c. 1349/1350). Also quoted by the Syriac author Jacob of Edessa (7th century) and the Armenian Synod of Sis (14th century).

**Witnesses to exclude the Johannine Comma:** Most Greek manuscripts, including the Codex Sinaiticus (350 ad), Codex Alexandrinus (400s), Codex Sangallensis 48 (800s), Codex Mosquensis I (800s), Codex Athous Lavrensis (800s or 900s), Codex Porphyrianus (800s) and most Byzantine text-type manuscripts. It is found in almost all Latin manuscripts, but excluded by the Latin Codex Amiatinus (700s). It is also omitted by Gothic, Ethiopic, Arabic, early Armenian, Georgian and Coptic manuscripts. It is excluded in the quotations of Clement of Alexandria (200s) and Leo the Great (400s).

## Reason for omission and conclusion

The omission of the Comma may be attributed to *parablepsis*, a scribal error where the eye mistakenly skips text due to *homoeoteleuton*. "Homoeoteleuton" refers to lines or phrases that end similarly, creating a visual trap for scribes. When this occurs, the scribe's eye can jump from one similar ending to another, resulting in the omission of the intervening text—a specific type of error known as *haplography* (where a repeated sequence is only written once). This theory is not speculative; it is supported by examples of this very error in even the so-called "most reliable manuscripts," which contain notable omissions caused by parablepsis.

A key example of this phenomenon is found in the transmission of 1 John 2:23, where a portion of the verse was omitted during early manuscript copying. Evidence suggests that the omission was caused by *homoeoteleuton*, as the text contained repeating endings that could easily confuse a scribe.

Consider the text as it appears in various manuscript traditions:

- **Textus Receptus (Beza 1598), Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, etc.:**

- "πας ο αρνουμενος τον ιον ουδε τον πατερα εχει ο ομολογων τον ιον και τον πατερα εχει"
- Translation: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."
- **Byzantine Majority Text:**
  - "πας ο αρνουμενος τον ιον ουδε τον πατερα εχει"
  - Translation: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father."

The omission occurs between "τον πατερα εχει" ("has the Father") at the end of the first phrase and the identical wording at the end of the second phrase. A scribe, upon completing the first "τον πατερα εχει," might have inadvertently skipped over to the second occurrence of the same phrase, thus omitting the entire clause "ο ομολογων τον ιον και τον πατερα εχει" ("whoever confesses the Son has the Father also").

This type of parablepsis is a well-documented phenomenon in the transmission of ancient texts, and the omission of 1 John 2:23b is a textbook case of how homoeoteleuton can lead to accidental errors.

Thus, the omission of the Johannine Comma in many Greek manuscripts can easily (at least partially) be attributed to scribal error, caused by scribes who seem to have mistakenly skipped the Comma due to similar endings in adjacent phrases. Additionally, as another factor the theological debates on the nature of the Trinity during the early centuries likely played a significant role in the omission of this verse in later manuscripts. As Jerome himself noted, some omissions were motivated by theological bias, reflecting the intense doctrinal conflicts of the time. It has been often proposed that Arianism may have influenced the omission of the Johannine Comma:

*“Therefore the Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Heidegger, citing Jerome, and the Lutheran theologians Johann Gerhard and Johann Andreas Quenstedt argued that the real corruption of the Greek text had been its “erasure by the fraud of the Arians,” not its addition by orthodox fathers. In a lengthy disputation on the question, Gerhard marshaled the evidence of manuscripts and versions in an effort to show this, and in his systematic theology he reaffirmed its authenticity.”* (Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: Reformation of Church Dogma (1300-1700))

These two factors—scribal error and doctrinal controversy—offer a compelling explanation for why the Johannine Comma is absent from a large number of Greek manuscripts. These two factors offer a sufficient explanation for the large omission of the Comma within the Byzantine text-type. Although some Byzantine witnesses still retained the text.

However, despite this absence, there are several reasons to support the inclusion of the Johannine Comma in the New Testament as previously mentioned. It has strong early attestation within the broader Christian tradition. Many early Christian writers and theologians referred to or implied the verse in their writings, and it consistently appeared in early Latin translations, such as the Vulgate, as well as in the Old Latin traditions. The Comma has been consistently present throughout church history, preserved in the Textus Receptus and recognized by many theologians as authentic Scripture. Its inclusion in nearly all early vernacular translations attests to its enduring presence and its recognition throughout the centuries implies a level of divine acceptance and preservation.

God's promise to preserve His word is clear in Scripture (Psalm 12:6–7, Psalm 119:89, Matthew 5:18, Psalm 117:2, Matthew 24:35, and 1 Peter 1:25), and the Johannine Comma can be seen as part of

this divine preservation. The strong manuscript tradition, early church recognition, Greek grammar and theological importance of the verse all point to its authenticity. Thus, there is substantial evidence to support the inclusion of the Johannine Comma within the New Testament text, and the traditional reading of the Textus Receptus remains accurate and reliable.

(All of the relevant information in this booklet is human-generated; however, AI has been used to refine grammar and writing style)

